



New Jersey Department of Children and Families Policy Manual

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Introduction

1-14-2008

This subsection sets forth policy, procedure and case handling standards related to the gathering of information in a child protective service investigation. See [CP&P-II-A-1-100](#), SCR Generally, and see [CP&P-II-C-2-300](#), Timeframes for Initial Response.

See Volume II Chapter E, the Allegation-Based System, for a comprehensive listing of the specific CPS allegations CP&P accepts for investigation. The Allegation-Based System directs the child protective service response, based on the specific nature of the presenting allegation.

Investigation is the "second step" of the information gathering process that begins with screening.

The investigation of reports alleging child abuse or neglect is statutorily mandated by Titles 9 and 30. Specifically, the Division of Child Protection and Permanency is required to conduct a thorough investigation of the circumstances under which the child is alleged to have been harmed or placed at risk of harm, and to assess the harm or risk so that, when necessary, appropriate child protection or child welfare services can be provided.

Purpose of Child Protective Service Investigations

2-24-97

The purpose of the child protective services (CPS) investigation is to:

- gather all relevant information, including information about the circumstances which led to or may lead to harm to the child - see [CP&P-II-C-2-200](#) and [CP&P-II-C-5-1100](#);
- determine what harm the child has suffered or is at risk of suffering - See [CP&P-III-B-6-600](#) , [CP&P-II-C-5-1100](#), and [CP&P-II-C-5-700](#);

- take action as necessary to ensure the current safety of the child;
- assess the service needs of all family members and begin interventions to ensure the continued safety and well-being of the child and improve family functioning on a longer range basis; and
- make an official determination as to whether a child is an abused or neglected child.

As the designated state child welfare agency, the Division has the additional responsibility of simultaneously conducting a child welfare assessment of the service needs of the child and family. Thus, whatever the CPS investigation findings, the Worker is responsible for determining whether there are other concerns about the child's or family's abilities, functioning, or resources which have the potential to negatively impact on the child's growth and development or on the integrity of the family unit and the family's overall well-being. See [CP&P-II-C-6-100](#) and [CP&P-I-A-1-300](#).

Definitions 4-1-2013

See [CP&P-II-C-6-100](#), the section entitled CPS Investigation Finding Determinations - Four (4) Tier Findings.

The Supervisor's Role in Investigation 2-24-97

The Supervisor plays a key role in the investigative process. He or she:

- determines if a response worker needs to make face-to-face contact with a child and his family;
- assigns the child abuse/neglect report for investigation to a response worker;
- assigns a time frame for response that fits the urgency of the situation as determined by information collected by the screener;
- consults with the response worker and helps him or her strategize the investigation. See Pre-investigation Conference and Strategizing Next Steps, below;
- monitors the response to ensure that the time frame is met;
- ensures that appropriate cases have been referred for consultation with a CP&P pediatric consultant;
- ensures that the necessary record checks have been done or are in progress;

- ensures that police back-up has been arranged in situations that require it;
- assigns a buddy to accompany the primary response worker as necessary;
- coordinates the response, and is available to the primary response worker and/or the buddy for consultation while they are in the field;
- oversees the collection of additional collateral information;
- remains available and accessible to the response worker from the time the initial field response begins until the time it is concluded -- This means providing supervision to any response worker who is still in the field at the end of the normal work day;
- consults with the Case Work Supervisor and/or the LO Manager on all very high risk and high risk cases.

The Worker and Supervisor consult with the Casework Supervisor, L.O. Manager, Area and Central Office staff, and professional experts as necessary.

The Casework Supervisor shall establish a system to monitor the progress of very high risk and high risk investigations and may decide to share day-to-day responsibility for overseeing the investigation of any particular case (or cases) with the first-line Supervisor.

Pre-investigation Conference

2-24-97

The supervisor and assigned Worker hold a pre-investigation conference to plan:

- a coordinated field visit with the county prosecutor's office or other law enforcement agency (if applicable); See [CP&P-II-C-4-200](#).
- what collateral contacts are necessary and available to offer information; who has been contacted by the screener and who should be contacted by the assigned Worker;
- the order of interviews and collateral contacts. See [CP&P-II-C-5-1000](#);
- when and where the child-victim should be interviewed and whether anyone else should be present and, if so, who;
- the scheduling of a physical examination for the child with an expert medical practitioner, if warranted;

- for protection for the victim. For example, plan in advance if removal and placement of the child and/or arrest of the perpetrator is being considered;
- how Worker/Supervisor communication will be maintained during the investigation process, as necessary;
- whether a teamed field response is necessary. See [CP&P-IX-A-1-100](#).

Strategizing Next Steps

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After collateral information is obtained and/or after the child is actually interviewed, the assigned Worker and Supervisor jointly strategize the next steps of the investigation:

- re-contact the County Prosecutor with updated information when required by policy or agreement;
- plan for interviewing siblings, parent(s), and the alleged perpetrator;
- determine precautions warranted to insure the safety of the child (e.g., should the child be detained at school until the parents are seen? Should extended family be contacted to provide protection or placement for the child?);
- determine whether the child needs medical attention now, or later, or not at all.

The Response Worker's Role in Investigation

2-6-2012

“The child protective investigator shall, in completing an investigation of a report containing any allegation:

1. Complete a safety assessment;
2. Interview, in person and individually, the caregiver and each adult in the home. The child protective investigator shall interview the alleged child victim's caregiver on the same day as the alleged child victim, if possible;
3. In cases where a service case is currently closed but had been open within the previous two years, interview a prior permanency worker who is the most knowledgeable about the family, if he or she is available;
4. Interview, in person and individually, each other child residing in the home of the alleged child victim. The child protective investigator shall observe each non-verbal child;
5. Read and review each available prior investigation relevant to the report;

6. Interview the reporter and each other person identified in the current report or related information as having knowledge of the incident or as having made an assessment of physical harm, including, but not limited to, the:
 - i. Physician;
 - ii. Medical examiner;
 - iii. Coroner;
 - iv. Other professional who treated the alleged child victim's current condition, other than the reporter;
 - v. Assigned permanency worker;
 - vi. Youth services provider;
 - vii. Private agency caseworker; and
 - viii. Other Department representative working with the alleged child victim or his or her family;
7. Interview the alleged perpetrator, in person;
8. Complete a Child Abuse Record Information check of each household member and each other individual regularly frequenting or living in the alleged child victim's home;
9. Conduct a PROMIS/GAVEL check to identify a paramour's record of criminal history, when the report involves a paramour;
10. Complete a risk assessment.
11. Observe the environment where alleged abuse or neglect occurred or which poses a threat to the child; and
12. Obtain and document written approval by a supervisor when seeking to eliminate any requirement listed in (b)1 through 11 above.” (N.J.A.C. 3A:10-3.1(b))

The child protective investigator shall also observe the physical and emotional state of the parent, caregiver, temporary caregiver, institutional caregiver, or alleged perpetrator responsible for the child at the time of the alleged abuse or neglect;

- “(a) The child protective investigator may make an unannounced visit to the alleged child victim's residence or place where the alleged child victim, or his or her parent or guardian, is located, when conducting the investigation except that, if the parent or guardian has explicitly forbidden contact with the child, an Order to Show Cause to Investigate may be required prior to contact.
- (b) The child protective investigator may remove, move or cause to be removed or moved only that clothing necessary to view suspected injuries, when conducting the investigation. This shall be done in a manner consistent with the alleged child victim's sense of privacy and in consideration of the age, sex and emotional state of the alleged child victim and the need to limit the number of physical examinations the alleged child victim undergoes. This shall be done only in the presence of an adult supportive of the alleged child victim, except in emergency situations.
- (c) The child protective investigator may photograph or arrange to photograph the alleged child victim's injury or harm, whenever there are visible indications of injury or harm, and subsequently to record the results of the injury or harm, when conducting the investigation.” (N.J.A.C. 3A:10-3.3)

The child protective investigator may interview the child subject of the investigation and other children in the household or institution apart from his or her parent, caregiver, temporary caregiver, or institutional caregiver.

While the role of the investigating Worker varies with the circumstances of each case, at a minimum, the investigating Worker:

- explains the purpose of the investigation to each person interviewed. See [CP&P-III-C-7-100](#);
- identifies who the family consists of, including boyfriends, girlfriends, other adults, and children who live in the home or appear to frequent it on a regular basis,
- identifies who in the home cares for the children, even those who do it only on a very temporary basis;
- interviews the child separately,
- interviews parent/caregiver separately;
- interviews all residents in and persons, frequenting the home;
- interviews, separately, any other child in the home who may have been abused or neglected or who may be at risk of harm;

- observes the interactions between the parent and the child;
- observes the family dynamics -- the Worker notes the emotional tone -- are family members angry, frightened, overwhelmed, frustrated? How do family members interact with each other? How do family members interact with the worker? What strengths does the family have to draw upon? Above all: do children appear to be safe in this environment with the level of care they are provided?
- observes the family's ability to cope: e.g., does it look like the family generally tries and is able to manage day-to-day life -- or do things look out of control? Is there order in the home, or is the atmosphere chaotic? (Some signs that a family may have lost its ability to manage might include: the home is very dirty and disordered; food-encrusted dishes have accumulated over a period of days, there is little or no food or the available food is not appropriate, e.g., soda for an infant; mattresses are soiled and/or urine soaked and may be placed on the floor; people seem to come and go at will; there are correctable physical hazards in the home that haven't been addressed -- all of these things are potential signs that there is a significant underlying problem);
- assesses how much risk there is to a child and identifies what the source of the risk is;
- assesses whether there is substance use disorder -- the chaotic conditions and breakdown in family relationships described in the preceding bullets are often symptoms of substance use disorder and/or significant mental health problems -- the two often exist in combination. Chronic substance users typically deny using drugs and/or alcohol and so do the people around them including their children. The Worker needs to be familiar with the behavioral and environmental indicators of substance use disorder and must make skillful use of collateral information sources to identify or verify the problem.
- evaluates the child's safety and well-being;
- identifies and assists the family in identifying the underlying causes of its problems so that appropriate services can be provided to all family members who need them and so that appropriate actions to reduce risk of harm to the children can be implemented;
- identifies what actions are necessary to reduce the risk and implements them;
- takes any action necessary to ensure the safety of the child;

- researches and interviews collateral resources, for example, area hospitals for previous admittance, schools, police, neighbors, relatives and any other leads given in collected information. (Note: When contacting a neighbor, the Worker meets with him or her in person, whenever possible. The Worker should exercise discretion, make efforts to respect client confidentiality when seeking to elicit relevant information, and attempt to avoid disclosing more client information than is essential.);
- documents specific facts about the above and puts them into definite, descriptive terms;
- collects relevant and available documents or reports on the child or parents;
- contacts expert witnesses, as appropriate;
- records findings giving specific dates and observations and separating facts from subjective evaluation.
- establishes the evidence by obtaining affidavits and/or reports and carefully examines and documents all information related by the people interviewed, when there is any indication that litigation may be necessary.